

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride and pleasure that I rise to urge the enactment of H.R. 622, The Economic Security and Worker Assistance Act of 2002, also known as the Hope for Children Act.

I cannot overemphasize how proud I am to be an original cosponsor of the Hope for Children Act. Mr. DEMINT deserves our thanks and praise for his work on this bill.

Mr. Speaker, throughout my 21 years in Congress, I have worked tirelessly with a broad, bipartisan group of colleagues, to protect children. Encouraging adoption has been among our primary concerns. Along those ends, I have introduced my own legislation that designated National Adoption Week, and I worked to help establish the current \$5,000 tax credit for adopting parents. The \$5,000 tax credit, which was incorporated into the "Contract with America," passed by Congress, and later signed into law, is helping many families that have adopted a child.

But there is still so much to be done. There are so many children that need to be adopted. There are so many infertile couples who desperately want to raise children. This legislation today is needed. H.R. 622 seeks to double the adoption tax credit to \$10,000 for all adoptions and double the employer adoption assistance exclusion to \$10,000. The legislation also increases the income cap at which the credit begins to phase out from \$75,000 to \$150,000.

The fact of the matter is that adoptions are very costly, ranging from \$8,000 to \$30,000 per year. There are many families who would like to open their home to a child, but are prevented or delayed on doing so by the high cost of adoption. H.R. 622 helps to ease this financial burden to ensure that children quickly find a permanent, loving home—so that no child is left behind to end up in the foster care system permanently.

The empirical evidence shows conclusively that the tax credit must be increased. Just take a look at the tax return data. According to the Committee report accompanying this bill, half of the taxpayers who received income tax benefits for adoption expenses in 1998 reported expenses in excess of \$5,000, while 25 percent of taxpayers receiving tax benefits for adoption reported expenses totaling more than \$10,000.

It is important to note that the \$5,000 tax credit expires this year and the current \$5,000 employer adoption assistance exclusion also expires—it is vital that we enact this important legislation to help defray these costs.

The Hope for Children Act is a solid start to ensuring that more children find a loving home. While some adoptions will cost well over \$10,000—the data suggests that as many as 25 percent of all adoptions fall into this category—raising the limit will aid more families in their efforts to adopt a child in need. If the President signs the Hope for Children Act into law this year, families could claim the \$10,000 tax credit beginning with their 2003 tax returns.

One final note. Virtually every well-conducted social research study that has examined the impact of adoption on a child concludes that adoption is far more preferable than state custody. The adoption of a child into a traditional two-parent, man and woman family, has profoundly positive social consequences for both the child, as well as for

our society. A recent Heritage Foundation analysis of the adoption research literature shows that adopted children raised in a two-parent family, measure as well as, if not better than, a biological child on virtually every social, educational, and health indicator assessed.

The route by which the Hope for Children Act has arrived here in the House again deserves some discussion. On May 17, 2001, this bill was agreed to by a vote of 420–0. On February 6, 2002, the Senate passed the measure with an amendment to add tax relief and economic stimulus language. Today we are adding some additional tax relief provisions, so that unemployment insurance benefits will be extended to all displaced workers regardless of how their job losses occurred.

New Jersey's economy was hit very hard by terrorism. First we lost approximately 700 New Jerseyans on September 11, including nearly 50 from my own Fourth District. In addition to the unbearable loss of life, there were tens of thousands of jobs held by people from New Jersey that disappeared into the great cloud of fire, smoke, and ash of the collapsing Twin Towers. Entire businesses and departments were wiped out in an instant.

Before the shock waves of September 11, had even faded, New Jersey was plunged into another unprecedented crisis, as the first major biological weapons attack in U.S. history took place on New Jersey soil. Our mail system ground to a halt. Items frozen in the mail included everything from an engagement ring to credit card bills. Thousands of lives were turned upside down. Another wave of jobs were lost. To this day, the John K. Rafferty Post Office in Hamilton has not reopened, and hundreds of postal workers who work there are now scattered all over the state in makeshift accommodations.

Mr. Speaker, New Jersey's residents need a helping hand. We need this stimulus package. People are hurting. I think the Senate should move promptly and pass H.R. 622. It is time to put the interests of the American people ahead of partisan calculations.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the unanimous passage of the Hope for Children Act.

Ms. KILPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, once again, the Republicans are attempting to shove forward several tax provisions for the wealthy and big businesses without adequate consideration for the unemployed and low-income.

This is the third time in five months that an economic stimulus package has been to the House floor. Not once out of the three times, has there been sufficient assistance in the form of health insurance converge and unemployment benefits for the unemployed and low-income families. Not once have Republican considered the long-term effect of the unnecessary tax cuts. Not once have they considered anything else but their special interests, the wealthy.

We need a bill that will give better backing for COBRA insurance. The tax credit that this bill provides will do nothing for the families and individuals who cannot afford to pay up-front for the insurance packages. While Democrats have been fighting to help the jobless and low-wage workers, the number of those in need has grown and each individual has been without federal income support since March, when this recession officially started.

While we stand in the midst of a recession, we have Members of Congress who contritely

confess their sincere desire to help the American people, but simultaneously provide help for only approximately 25 percent of the American people, who happen to be very wealthy. The rest of the nation will suffer because they are not wealthy enough or because they are not highly compensated executives in the corporate world.

This bill follows the pattern this Congress established when it passed the airline bailout bill last October. We provided \$15 billion in financial assistance to financially strapped airlines following the September 11th attack, but the leadership of this Chamber did nothing for rank-and-file workers who were laid off by the airlines. Last November, this Chamber bailed out the insurance industry, which covered the airline industry we bailed out the month before, but the leadership did nothing for rank-and-file workers who were laid off by the airlines or as a result of the economic recession.

This bill today, like the others before, is another tax break bill for people who do very well in good times and bad, but it does very little for the people who need the most help—the jobless and low wage workers. Once again, this bill, like the others before, puts those most in need as a last priority. That's unacceptable. For that reason, I will vote "no". Mr. Speaker, we can do better than this. It's unfortunate that the other side of the aisle does not negotiate in good faith. No one saw this bill before it came to the House floor. It did not go through the committee process. This is a product of an autocratic procedure. It is put out for us to take or leave. That's it. I urge my colleagues to join me in rejecting this bill.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 622, the Hope For Children Act which will increase the adoption tax credit for families. I am an original cosponsor of this legislation and I commend the gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. DEMINT for his leadership on this important issue.

I am particularly pleased that with today's vote we will be adding a provision to temporarily extend unemployment compensation for an additional 13 weeks for individuals who have exhausted their 26 weekly benefits, and will provide needs assistance to New York under the Liberty Program.

As our nation begins to rebound economically it is important that we provide American's who have been adversely affected by the events of September 11th and the subsequent economic downturn with the means to provide for their families. Representing numerous individuals affected by the slow down of the airline, travel, and tourism industry in New York, I know how important this extension will be in assisting these hard working individuals. This economic package is a major step to regaining a healthy economy. Each of the components will help us stimulate different areas of the economy and promote growth and jobs. Our economy has weathered turbulence in the past during times of war and times of peace. But a sound, reasoned economic growth package, such as the one we are working to pass, will put us on the right track back to prosperity.

Accordingly, I urge my colleagues to support this important measure.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, on this Valentine's Day the Republican leadership is presenting America's largest corporations and wealthiest individuals with another sweetheart